

Cave of the Sybil of Cumae, near Naples

The ancient Greeks carved this entryway into a cave found in the hills north of Naples. Large keyhole-shaped openings allow light to penetrate this passageway in the afternoon. As early as 300 B.C., this dramatic entrance greeted those who sought the advice of the Cumaean Sybil. Dignitaries such as Vergil (70–19 B.C.) and Emperor Claudius (10 B.C.–54 A.D.) traveled great distances to consult the oracles.

Crypt of San Zaccaria, Venice

In the eleventh century, the Venetians constructed twin crypts utilizing a similar structure and style at San Zaccaria and at the more famous basilica of San Marco. During the high tides of late fall and winter, briny water occasionally seeps through the floor into this crypt. When this photograph was taken, three inches of water covered the floor. In the devastating flood of 1966, seven feet of water filled the crypt reaching to just below the ceiling.

After the Rain, Lucca

The streets in the ancient walled city of Lucca are paved with interlocking stone blocks. In the puddles are reflected the three-and four-story residences on either side of this street.

Canal Reflections, Venice

This scene near Campo Santa Margherita includes a kiosk that sells newspapers. Students from the nearby economics department of the University of Venice often purchase newspapers at the kiosk and sit reading or talking as they swing their legs over the edge of the canal. The image was turned 180 degrees so the buildings would appear upright.

Fishing Boats, Lerici

The English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley made his home on a small island off the coast of this charming town. He set sail from here and drowned in July 1822. Local fishermen still use this beach to launch their boats. Because of the exquisite views and temperate climate, the town is also a popular resort destination.

Pebble Wall, Marchese, Sicily

Fifty years ago a local tuna factory used this enormous kettle to boil chunks of tuna for canning. When the factory closed, the owners moved the six-foot-wide kettle to their farm where it held water for sheep and goats. Since animals are no longer kept on this property, the kettle is now purely decorative.

Wheels of Cheese, near Cremona

The cheese called grana is similar in taste to Parmesan. During the curing process, these wheels of grana weighing over sixty pounds are soaked in salt water for a month. Then the employees of Produttori Associati Latte Cremona (P.L.A.C.) place the wheels on shelves in a climate-controlled warehouse to age for twelve to eighteen months.

Making Ricotta, Marchese, Sicily

The ghostly figure in the background is a farmer stirring a large kettle of milk as he waits for the curds to coagulate and float. He will then scoop out the curds swiftly so they don't overcook. He puts them in a sieve (left) so the whey drains out, leaving the ricotta behind.

Kitchen of a Trullo, Ceglie Messapica

Farmers in this region live frugally. As in the old days, they raise their own vegetables, make their own wine, and gather olives from their trees to be pressed into oil. This kitchen, without running water, is rarely used by the brother and sister who live in this trullo. Instead, they eat with their neighbors, whose trullo is slightly more modern.

Lace Making, near Brindisi

Making lace takes so much time that few women still possess the patience and skill. A piece of lace six inches square requires forty to eighty hours of work. This elevated pillow holds the lace in place so a woman can work at eye level while she sits at a table.

Wine Bottles, La Morra

Amid the vineyards of Piedmont, Renato Ratti established a small museum of wine making. In one corner, this forgotten collection of bottles and gourds has been overtaken by spiders. Gourds such as these were used by vineyard workers to carry wine or water for sustenance during the workday.

Silverware, Genova

The yellowed label in the top of this box advertised the services of the man who made the box at least two centuries ago. In it he notes where he can be contacted and what other carrying cases he could construct to order. Though a family heirloom, this silverware is kept readily accessible for daily use

Colander and Hand-Blown Bottle, near Foggia

A century ago, some vintners prevented oxidation not by corking wine but by topping it with a few drops of olive oil. When they were ready to drink the wine, they utilized curious bottles like this one to remove the oil. They placed the curved tube just deep enough into the neck of the wine bottle to touch the oil, then they sucked on the upright tube, as if it were a straw, to draw the oil off the top of the wine.

Astronomy Books, Palermo

These books show an evolving understanding of the heavens. The largest, an atlas printed by J. B. Homann in Nuremberg in 1712, illustrates the orbits of Venus and Mercury. At the lower left is a page from the famous encyclopedia by Diderot and D'Alembert that describes an instrument used to measure stellar positions; this edition was published in Livorno in 1772. The notations on the right, made by Giuseppe Piazzi in 1793, record the positions of stars for a catalogue he compiled.

Armillary Sphere, Florence

Constructed in 1564 by Gerolamo della Volpaia, this armillary sphere was created to illustrate the structure of the universe. The glass ball at the center of this sphere represents the earth. The vertical rings on the inside divide the globe into quadrants; the horizontal circles represent the equator and the Arctic and Antarctic circles. The outer ring shows the constellations of the Zodiac as they appear in the heavens during the course of the year.

Observatory, Castel Gandolfo

Pope Leo XIII founded the Vatican's first observatory on a hill near the center of Rome in 1891. By 1935 the night skies in Rome had become too bright for astronomical observations so, under the direction of Pope Pius XI, the church transferred its main observatory to Castel Gandolfo, outside of Rome. In 1981, because of light pollution, a second research center was established in conjunction with the University of Arizona at the Steward Observatory in Tucson. The Jesuit astronomers now split their time between the two locations.

Covered Courtyard, Castel Gandolfo

In the summer the pope is often in residence at Castel Gandolfo. On Sundays after mass, he stands on a balcony opposite this facade and blesses the people who gather below. An awning covers the entire courtyard protecting the public from heat and rain.

Anatomical Theater, Padova

During the Renaissance, the University of Padova was considered one of the most liberal universities in Europe. In 1594, its medical school authorized teaching from the dissection of human cadavers and set up an anatomical theater. Cadavers were brought to the medical school at night and hoisted into the theater. Medical students stood in elevated concentric ovals to watch the dissections by candlelight. The medical school continued to use the anatomical theater for three hundred years.

Alley, Genova

Viewed from a rooftop garden overlooking the square of San Matteo, this alley typifies the city design of old Genova. In medieval times, the administrative center of the city lay in the narrow valley at the base of the hills that surround the city. Since space was limited, tall buildings lined both sides of narrow serpentine alleys leading to the sea. Genova, a rich port city, was never successfully attacked from the sea: perhaps the alleys, acting like a maze, confused foreign invaders and protected the city's center

Rialto Bridge, Venice

In the late sixteenth century, a competition was held to replace the rickety wooden bridge in this location. Antonio da Ponte submitted this daring design which spanned one hundred fifty-six feet of the Grand Canal with a single arch. The judges questioned its structural integrity, but awarded him the commission. Built in 1591, Rialto Bridge still marks the commercial and economic center of Venice.

Trompe l'Oeil, near Pisa

The prior of this monumental monastery employed master baroque painters to repaint the interior with trompe l'oeil from 1760 to 1790. The frescoes created an illusion of space in its small chapels. Established in 1366, the monastery closed in 1969, reflecting the decline in the number of monks entering the priesthood. Now the monastery is open to the public as natural history museum.

Wall Frieze, Pompeii, near Naples

This men's bathhouse was excavated in the early 1800s from beneath the volcanic dust that covered Pompeii after the eruption of Vesuvius. The men undressed in this room and put their clothes on shelves before entering the bath. The frieze of figures, flowers, and animals begins at eye level and extends overhead.

Fountain of Shames, Palermo

This fountain is located next to Palermo's city hall and faces one of the largest churches in Palermo. Made by two Florentine designers, it was shipped to Palermo in pieces and arrived in 1573. It is known as the Fountain of Shames because exposed genitalia are called "shames" in Italian.

Head of Constantine, Rome

During his reign (306–337 A.D.), Emperor Constantine permitted the establishment of the Christian church and allowed Christians to worship freely. Only the head, arm, and foot of this immense statue remain; the bust alone, eight feet high, attests to the power of the Roman Empire during Constantine's rule.

Columns, Selinunte

The ancient Greeks selected a site overlooking the Mediterranean when building Selinunte in the seventh century B.C. When completed, it was one of the most impressive temple complexes of the ancient civilized world. Destroyed by repeated invasions and massive earthquakes, little remains of the original structures. In 1958 archaeologists reassembled the temple pictured here, but the foreground column sections belong to a neighboring temple that remains in pieces.

Olive Trees, Ceglie Messapica

Olive trees live and produce olives for hundreds of years, requiring little maintenance beyond periodic pruning. In the early fall farmers collect the fruit by climbing ladders and shaking the branches until the olives fall onto nets laid on the ground.

Metal Gate and Wisteria, Ostuni

In the 1750s these arches were constructed to decorate a country garden. The garden and its villa have passed unchanged from one generation to the next, testifying to this family's profound commitment to preserving the past.

Poplar Forest, Po River Delta

To provide the paper industry with wood pulp, farmers plant poplar forests in flat riverside land. Though densely planted, the trees thrive in this environment; within ten years they grow large enough to be sent to paper mills. On the day of this photograph, a light layer of fog floated just above the treetops, creating the illusion of light at the end of each row.

Blowing Curtain, near La Spezia

The bay of La Spezia and the dramatic Ligurian coast are visible from this villa. On warm days, the owners open the large glass doors in the living room, allowing the sea breeze to flow into the house. During the seventeenth century, black lamps, like the one on the left, illuminated the altars of churches in Venice with candlelight.

Looking Glass, Genova

The brush, mirror, and shoehorn in this still life date from the early twentieth century. The modern silver vase, whose hammered surface distorts the reflection, gives a view of the bedroom and a portrait of the photographer.

Violin Construction, Cremona

Cremona, the home of Stradivarius, is still known for its violins. At the time of Stradivarius (1644?–1737) trees grown in the mountains were floated by river to Cremona where they were cut into sections and aged. Modern violin makers have not been able to replicate the sound of Stradivarius's instruments. Although they carve to identical dimensions, they cannot match the wood or the varnish.

Gonzaga Family Portrait by Mantegna, Mantova

Between 1465 and 1474, Andrea Mantegna painted this unidealized portrait of Marquis Ludovico and his wife and daughters as part of a roomful of frescoes depicting the noble family's life. Mantegna included courtiers, the family dog, and a servant who is a dwarf in this masterpiece of renaissance art.

Makeup Box, near La Spezia

An eighteenth-century Venetian woman carried her cosmetics in this portable makeup box when traveling. Its current owner stores her collection of antique china teacups in it.

Opera Box at La Scala, Milan

During World War II an Allied bomb fell on La Scala, the most famous opera house in Italy, destroying the ceiling and about half the boxes. The upholstery in this undamaged box dates from 1768, as do the mirrors that reflect tiers of boxes on the opposite side of the opera house.

Decay of a Theater, Pisa

In 1771 the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Pietro Leopoldo de Medici, donated land to build this theater near the University in Pisa. It was constructed in 392 days in time for a winter season opening. Early in the twentieth century the theater was used as a cinema. At present it is owned and marginally maintained by the Italian government, but nothing has reversed its deterioration since its closure in 1966.

Marionettes, Milan

For centuries marionette companies entertained children in village squares throughout Italy, but now few survive. Historically, the marionettes used by Carlo Colla e Figli of Milan were operated exclusively by family members. But the last family descendant had no children to help him perform. He started a cooperative with young people to preserve this rich tradition. The marionettes pictured here are characters from the tale of Aladdin and his magic lamp.

Foundry, Naples

Patrizio Depietro and the artisans of his foundry pour molten bronze once every two or three weeks. In between pours, they create duplicates of sculptures in wax sections. Subsequently, they encase the sections in a plaster-like substance, burn out the wax, and bury the molds in sand. On the morning of the pour, they melt the alloy of copper, tin, and zinc and pour it into the buried forms.

Wax Figures, Naples

Patrizio Depietro keeps his wax forms in water so they will not lose their detail in the heat.

When his artisans finish making a wax model, they attach sprues (wax extensions) before encasing it in plaster. During the pour, the molten bronze flows to all parts of the figure by following the path of the sprues. When the pour is complete the laborious finishing work begins: the artisans cut off the sprues, smoothing and polishing the bronze to imitate the original.

Gondola Repairs, Venice

Few workshops in Venice are still capable of building, repairing, and refinishing gondolas; one belongs to Crea (Gianfranco Vianello). The gondola is not symmetrical from side to side and is higher in the stern. The asymmetrical design compensates for the weight of the gondolier and the fact that he rows with a single oar on the right side. Before a gondola is complete, the artisans paint it with ten coats of various marine paints, finishing with several coats of high gloss enamel so its surface will shimmer. In this photograph a wide-angle lens exaggerates the asymmetry of the gondolas.

Model for the Three Muses, Possagno

The sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822) is known for his large figurative statues. To create them, he and his assistants converted miniature models into life-sized plaster forms studded with black reference points. These dots acted as markers for a protractor that guided the carving of the marble. After his death, Canova's home in Possagno became a museum.

Jester, Ostuni

Large murals painted on wood cover the walls of this 250-year-old country home. In the center of one of the murals, a court jester is drinking. A key (not pictured) near the left side of his belt opens a liquor cupboard hidden in the recess between the walls.

Still Lives 1888/1996, near Brindisi

One hundred eight years after this painting was created, the artist's great-grandson found in his cupboards the very decanter and basket that appear in the painting as well as a plate and fork of the same pattern. Heirlooms from both sides of the family are used in this household every day.

Fortepiano, Venice

The fortepiano is a combination of a piano and clavichord. It is portable and produces a staccato tone like a clavichord but, like a piano, it uses hammers to strike the strings. In 1800, Vincenzus Cesare and Johannis Marcus of Venice signed and dated this instrument upon its completion.

Cross, Lucca

The church of Santa Maria Bianca was constructed in 739 and has been reconstructed many times since then. The whole building is rich with history; the sarcophagus on the left dates from 400. A small museum inside the church displays early liturgical clothing used by the priests, as well as Roman coins and bottles that were found during excavation.

Conversion of Saul, Palermo

Constructed in central Palermo during the twelfth century, the Palatine Chapel is known for its exquisite medieval mosaics. Studded with tens of thousands of small gold tiles, the mosaics shimmer in the light. To the right of the pillar is depicted the moment of Saul's baptism by Ananias (Acts 9:18–19). In the biblical account, God blinded Saul (later known as the Apostle Paul) in punishment but miraculously restored his eyesight at the moment of his baptism.

Bathhouse, Pompeii, near Naples

The bathhouses of Pompeii and Herculaneum also contained saunas: steam from a central furnace nearby circulated through the hollow walls and escaped into the room through vents in the floor. The names of the magistrates who financed the marble basin are inscribed on the basin's rim.

Remains of a Chapel, near Genova

Private chapels were often constructed as part of opulent villas. In this villa only men sat in the chapel, while women were relegated to two small rooms in balconies above the altar and heard the mass through a wooden grate. After the villa was abandoned in the early nineteenth century, robbers stripped it of everything of value including the cross in the chapel, leaving this hand-hewn ladder behind.

Pebble Wall, near Segesta, Sicily

Fifty years ago a local tuna factory utilized this enormous kettle to boil chunks of tuna for canning. When the factory closed, the owners moved the six-foot-wide kettle to their farm where it held water for sheep and goats. Since animals are no longer kept on this property, the kettle is now purely decorative.

Mosaic Atrium, Herculaneum, near Naples

When archeologists excavated the ruins of Herculaneum in the first half of the twentieth century, they uncovered the atrium of this elegant home. The floor, though no longer flat, still displays the original geometric mosaic pattern from two thousand years ago.

